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Cryptozoology, 8, 1989, 47–57
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FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS INTO THE REPORTED *YEREN*—THE WILDMAN OF CHINA

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Introduction

In October and November, 1989, the authors undertook a personal investigation into the possible existence of the reported Chinese Wildman, known as *yeren*. Besides the cities of Beijing and Shanghai, they visited areas in the provinces of Hubei, Sichuan, Guangxi, and Yunnan.

Like Sasquatch (Bigfoot) reports in North America and Yeti reports in the Himalayan region, Wildman reports have been the subject of much discussion and speculation in the West over the past decade. One of the authors (Poirier) had already gained considerable field experience in China during the course of studying the primates of that country, the third largest on Earth. This afforded him the opportunity to be the first Western scientist to evaluate the question firsthand (Frank E. Poirier, Hu Hongxing, and Chung-Min Chen, 1983, The Evidence for Wildman in Hubei Province, People's Republic of China, *Cryptozoology,* Vol. 2: 25–39). However, due to political, logistical, and linguistic factors, no western investigators had ever gone to China specifically for the purpose of examining the Wildman evidence in an attempt to reach a scientific determination. This, in fact, was our purpose.

The expedition to China was the subject of a documentary film production by a British firm, The Filmworks. The film is currently being edited and is due to be broadcast in 1990 by Channel 4 television in Britain, and by the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) television network in the United States. It will also be broadcast in Western Europe and Australia.

Narrative Description

After meeting in Beijing, we proceeded to Shanghai, where a visit was made to Liu Mingzhuang of the Hua Dong Teachers University. Professor Liu, a biologist, is secretary of the Chinese Wildman Research Association. He showed us much of the massive material he has accumulated over the years, which set the stage for our own investigations in the interior of China. We then flew to Wuhan, the capital of Hubei Province, an area with a high concentration of Wildman reports. In Wuhan, contact was established with Cheng Lian Sheng, a witness to a close-up sighting of a Wildman in May, 1976. The incident, which had occurred at night when the animal was observed by Cheng and five other cadres—all forestry workers—in the headlights of their truck, resulted in a large 1977 expedition into the Shennongjia region of Hubei province sponsored by the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

We interviewed Cheng at length, and were able to uncover details which had not previously been revealed. The animal, which had been "cornered" against the road embankment, was covered with reddish hair and had a very large, round belly. We were also able to determine that it *only* stood erect when it was attempting to scramble up the embankment. At other times, including when it finally escaped down a gully, it moved quadrupedally. Although it was nighttime, the witnesses had the truck's headlight beams on the animal, and they got within 6 feet (2 meters) of it, affording them an excellent view.

Mr. Cheng was thought to be reliable. His temperament was rational and sensible. He did not make any wild claims. We also determined that he was acquainted with known Chinese wildlife. At the conclusion of the interview, we suggested to him that the animal may have been an orang-utan (*Pongo*), which existed in China in the Pleistocene, and probably persisted there into historical times (they are now only found in restricted areas in Sumatra and Borneo, but not on mainland Asia). Mr. Cheng had seen orang-utans on film, and he stated that the animal he saw was not that ape. However, he admitted that it was more like an orang-utan than any other known animal.

From Wuhan, we embarked on a river boat for a 2-day journey up the Yangtze River, during which one of us (Poirier) became sick with fever; unfortunately, the associated ailments persisted throughout much of the expedition. The river journey took us through Hubei into Sichuan Province. We disembarked at Wan Xian, and the following day proceeded by Land

Cruiser over rough mountain terrain for 12 hours to the town of Wuxi. At Wuxi, we met many local dignitaries, including the local Party secretary and members of the Wuxi Science Committee. We were housed in the Science Committee Center. We held discussions with the Wuxi Science Committee, whose members are convinced the Wildman exists, and who supplied several hairs for analysis. Unfortunately, most of the other evidence they have collected is of little scientific value.

We also met several more Wildman witnesses, who had traveled from different parts of Sichuan to be interviewed (prior arrangements had been made for their arrival in Wuxi to meet us). In all cases, the witnesses were questioned intensively through the use of professional interpreters. A brief summary of their reports follows:

- Ye Wan Chou, male, and Chen Zong Chun, female. May, 1981. While tending sheep, the witnesses (8-year-old children at the time) observed a large red-haired "man" squatting down. They were frightened and left, but the animal followed them relatively slowly for some time. Its locomotion was described as bipedal, but leg-bending was also described. A search party later failed to find the animal. Closest distance: 25–30 feet (7–10 meters). Duration: 10/"a few" minutes.
- Zhou Xian Chun, female. April, 1981. The witness observed a large animal covered with red hair leaning bipedally against a tree. It then dropped to a quadrupedal stance and was observed for some time ascending the nearby mountain. The witness stated it was not a bear or a monkey. She was reportedly terrified by the sighting. A search by villagers failed to find the animal. Closest distance: 10 feet (3 meters). Duration: 20 minutes.
- Wu Ying Cai and Liu Gou Zhao, males. October, 1964. The first witness, a mute, observed a large, hair-covered, bipedal animal while cutting wood. It left by climbing a nearby mountain. (It must be admitted that interviewing a mute witness through the use of hand signals was not very productive.) The second witness saw it at a greater (300-foot/100-meter) distance. The animal was described as having robust human proportions. Closest distance: 100 feet (30 meters). Duration: 30 minutes.

After our stay in Wuxi, we proceeded by Land Cruiser further to the northeast—through rugged, mountainous areas of spectacular beauty—towards Shennongjia, a forest preserve on the Hubei-Sichuan border which is closed to foreigners (author Poirier has for years unsuccessfully sought a permit to enter Shennongjia to study golden monkeys). Shennongjia is said to be the site of a high incidence of albinism, such as in bears, is home to the endangered snub-nosed golden monkey, and is also where many Wildman reports have originated. After a 3-hour drive, the unpaved and narrow road ended near a forestry lodge, where we were housed, and from which we made forays into the montane forests. This was done in the company of

Li Guo Hua, a Wildman investigator with whom we had established both contact and rapport. Unbeknownst to Western cryptozoologists, Mr. Li has been quietly seeking the Wildman for 10 years.

Mr. Li spends most of the year living in the mountains searching for the Wildman and studying other wildlife; having habituated golden monkey groups, which he documented to us with photos, he probably has had more experience with those rare primates than any other human. Because of his intense, almost full-time search for the Wildman in very rugged terrain, he is without doubt the most active Wildman investigator in China. However, even though he has become an expert tracker and forest survivalist, and although he claims to have found evidence such as footprints and sleeping "nests"—and had three distant sightings—he has been unable to bring the search to successful fruition.

The authors found the steepness of the mountains to be a serious impediment to fieldwork in China, at least by those not thoroughly accustomed to mountain foot travel. Although this was already known to Poirier, these mountains, rising abruptly at angles of 75–80 degrees—literally forcing the trees and vegetation to grow sideways—allowed only slow-moving penetration of the forest with minimum weight carrying (Fig. 1). Essentially, this prevented deep excursions near Shennongjia, which was the original aim, and which was still about 60 miles distant. No direct physical evidence of the Wildman was found by the authors during these forays.

We then returned overland to Wuxi, and finally back towards the Yangtze River, flying out of the town of Liang Ping to Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan, and then back to Shanghai. In Shanghai, we visited Zeng Xianzhou and his colleagues in the Department of Nuclear Science at Fudan University to discuss the analysis of Wildman hair which had previously been conducted in their laboratory. Using a sophisticated Van der Graff accelerator, and more recently a tandem accelerator, Professor Zeng and his associates have been perfecting an elemental analysis technique called "particle-induced X-ray emission" (PIXE). This technique, which has a precision of within 5%, involves the bombardment of a sample by high-speed proton emissions, and is finding applications in biology, medicine, and even archaeology and art (Zeng Xianzhou, Wu Xiankang, Shao Qiyun, and Yao Huiying, 1989, An Improved On-Demand Beam Pulsing System and Its Application to Art and Archaeology, *Vacuum,* Vol. 39: 91–95).

With the Wildman hairs, which had come from different parts of China, the Fudan scientists consistently found that their average content ratio of Fe/Zn (proportion of iron to zinc) was about 50 times that found in human hairs and about 7 times that found in known primate hairs (Fig. 2). (These results will be published shortly in: Zeng Xianzhou *et al.,* 1990, Biomedical Applications of PIXE at Fudan University, *International Journal of PIXE,*

FIG. 1.—Typical view of montane forest in eastern Sichuan, with mountains rising at 75–80 degree angles. The steepness of the mountains was found to be a "serious impediment" by the authors.

Vol. 1[1]). During our conversations, the Fudan University physicists did not attempt to speculate on the implications of these results, and we ourselves are uncertain as to their full implications. Nevertheless, it does appear to be an instance in which modern analytical science supports the contention that some specific Wildman hairs derive from a higher primate not yet known to zoology. (Since our return from China, we have learned that Professor Zheng has analyzed another Wildman hair sample—with the same results.)

We also visited Cao Hanmin and his colleagues in the Department of Biology of East China Normal University. Professor Cao had analyzed Wildman hairs using a scanning electron microscope (SEM), and had found some interesting internal structural differences when comparing them to human and other primate hairs. Differences were found when comparing cuticular scales, medulla, and pigment granules (Cao Hanmin, Zhou Jinpeng, Jiang Fumin, and Liu Mingzhuang, 1987, Comparative Studies of Ultrastructure of Hairs of Some Unknown Animals, *Journal of the East China Normal University,* Natural Science Edition No. 3: 98–103).

Interviewed intensively about his findings, Professor Cao stated categorically that the hairs were not of known great apes or humans. Nevertheless, the hairs came from a higher primate (ape or human), and their closest

FIG. 2.—Zeng Xianzhou (below) indicating to author Frank Poirier the results of his Fudan University team's analysis of Wildman hairs using a technique known as Particle-Induced X-ray Emission (PIXE). The Chinese nuclear physicists found that the average content ratio of Fe/Zn (proportion of iron to zinc) in the hairs was about 50 times that found in human hairs, and about 7 times that found in known primate hairs. The PIXE analytical technique has a precision of within 5%.

morphological affinity is to humans. Professor Cao therefore concludes that they came from an unknown higher primate—presumably the one the local people call *yeren.* As before, the implications of Professor Cao's findings are difficult to assess, but, again, they support the notion of an unknown higher primate.

While in Shanghai, further discussion was held with Professor Liu of the Chinese Wildman Research Association, as well as with Association members Xu Yong Qing of the Anthropology Research Section of the Shanghai Museum of Natural History, and Zhang Hong Kui of the Institute of History of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences.

After Shanghai, we flew west again, this time to Guilin, in the southern province of Guangxi. This more tropical area, just a few hundred miles from Vietnam, is where the famous karst mountains dominate the landscape, rising abruptly like fingers. Here we teamed up with Wu Xinzhi, a world-renowned paleoanthropologist at the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology (IVPP), in Beijing, who had flown south to meet us.

Our plan was to visit the famous Liuzhou Cave with Professor Wu, who had worked in it many years before. The cave is where the three *Gigantopithecus* fossil mandibles were discovered in the 1950's (since then, two other mandibles from a different species have been found in India). We proceeded down the Li River in a hired riverboat to Yangshuo, after which we drove to the village of Liuzhou and the nearby Lengzhai Mountain, a karst formation, in which the cave is located.

Because of the Wildman's proposed relationship to *Gigantopithecus,* as well as the historical significance of the fossil discovery in itself, we were very desirous of entering the cave, which is located halfway up the mountain. The cave was closed during the Cultural Revolution, and afterwards was essentially abandoned. Nobody had entered it in about 25 years. Furthermore, we were surprised to learn that we were to be the first Westerners to ever enter the cave at all, which added some romance to the adventure.

Because part of the ascent involved an 80-foot cliff, a rope ladder was made for us by the local villagers. This facilitated our climbing the cliff and reaching the cave, although in the end Professor Wu opted to remain below. The interior had various chambers and corridors, and we were able to observe where previous excavations had been conducted. We felt that much more excavation could still be done in the relatively brittle limestone walls, and that new *Gigantopithecus* fossil material—perhaps even the long-sought skull and limb bones—could be uncovered with sufficient effort and patience. Furthermore, there are probably thousands of other such karst mountains in Guangxi Province containing similar caves, many of which might yield profitable results if excavated diligently.

After returning to Guilin, we flew to Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province (and where we heard that, some time before, a tiger had entered the town and eaten two people!). We visited the Kunming Institute of Zoology, and were hosted by Professor Ji Weizhi, the deputy director, who runs the Institute's Division of Primate Research (author Poirier had spent a month at the Institute in 1987). We were able to observe and handle the rare southern subspecies of the snub-nosed monkey (*Rhinopithecus roxellanae bieti*), two rare macaque species (*Macaca assamensis* and *Macaca thibetana*), and the white-browed gibbon ape (*Hylobates hoolock*), all three of which have, at different times, been mistaken for a Wildman by eyewitnesses.

Like most Chinese scientists, Professor Ji was skeptical about the Wildman. We also queried him on the possibility of living orang-utans in China as the explanation for some of the Wildman reports. He had not heard of this hypothesis before, and was doubtful, but he promised to remain alert to such a possibility. Author Greenwell also visited the Kunming Zoo, where much of China's rare fauna is to be seen, including the giant panda, the takin, and various subspecies of large cats.

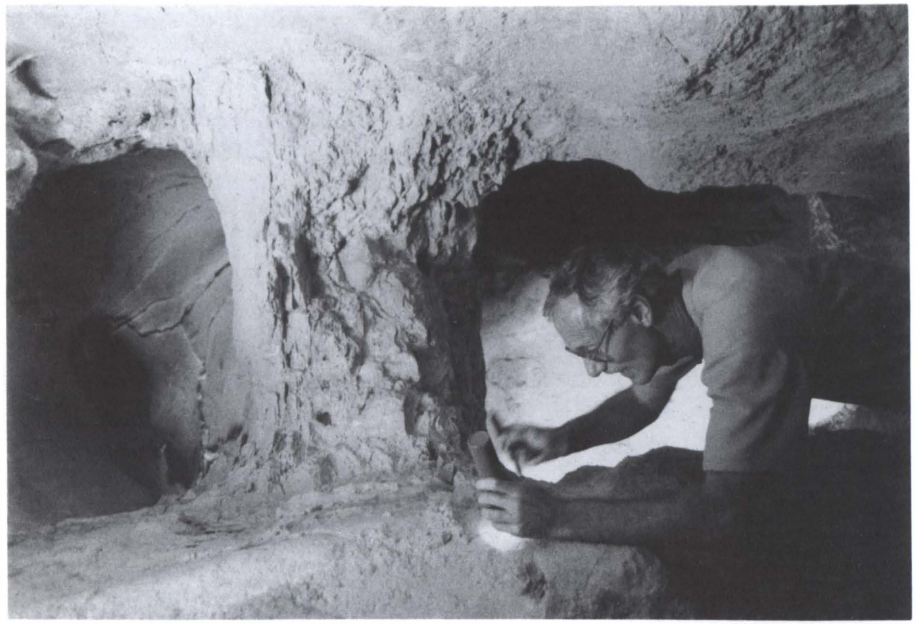

FIG. 3.—Author Frank Poirier examining the limestone interior of the famous Lengzhai Mountain Cave, in which the two *Gigantopithecus* fossil mandibles, and many teeth, were found in the 1950's. The cave, which had been abandoned for about 25 years, was located halfway up the mountain, and reaching it included negotiating an 80-foot cliff with a rope ladder. The authors feel that new *Gigantopithecus* fossil material could still be uncovered in the cave.

Upon returning to Beijing, a visit was made to IVPP for further discussion with Professor Wu, and acquaintance was also made with Professor Li Youheng, who had worked in the *Gigantopithecus* cave before its abandonment. Author Greenwell also visited Zhou Guoxing, of the Department of Anthropology at the Beijing Natural History Museum. Professor Zhou, who also serves as deputy director of the Museum, had recently opened a new and controversial exhibit on human evolution, which includes a Sasquatch/Wildman display. Greenwell held extensive discussions with Professor Zhou, who has investigated the Wildman question for many years (Zhou Guoxing, 1982, The Status of Wildman Research In China, *Cryptozoology,* Vol. 1: 13–23), and who serves on the Board of Directors of the International Society of Cryptozoology (ISC). Professor Zhou is not fully convinced of the Wildman's existence, but he believes the matter deserves continued investigation. He was skeptical of the possibility of living orang-utans in China.

By coincidence, visiting Beijing at the same time as the authors—to conduct research at IVPP—was Nikolai Spassov, a mammalogist at Bulgaria's National Museum of Natural History, and also an ISC Board member. The opportunity was taken by one author (Greenwell, who serves as ISC Secretary) to discuss with Spassov cryptozoology in general and the Wildman situation in particular. Dr. Spassov was sympathetic to the possibility of living orang-utans in China.

RESULTS

The authors did not discuss their personal evaluations of the evidence between themselves until near the end of the expedition. This was done partly to accommodate the requirements of the filming project, but also because of a legitimate desire not to unduly influence one another. Upon comparing notes, however, it was found that both of us assigned a higher than 50% probability to some kind of primate or primates "inconsistent with the known fauna of China" being responsible for Wildman reports. Of particular interest was the shift that had occurred in our assessment of the Wildman's possible existence since our arrival in China.

Initially, author Greenwell, based on his prior knowledge of the subject, had assigned a 30% probability to the unknown animal hypothesis, and author Poirier, who was far more skeptical, only about a 5% probability. At the end of the expedition, in order to arrive at some sort of objective, quantifiable conclusion, we ranked on a scale of 1 to 10 the value of the different kinds of evidence we had been exposed to, thus: existing habitat, eyewitness reports, footprint casts, and hair analyses. Habitat and hair analyses received high marks, eyewitness reports moderate marks, and footprint casts poor marks.

Upon tabulating the totals, it was found that author Greenwell assigned a probability of 60%, and author Poirier a probability of 52%. It is of interest that, while Greenwell's probability assignation had doubled, and was still the higher, Poirier's had increased tenfold. It was also determined, in the course of further discussions, that our subjective "beliefs" in the Wildman approximated the above objective probability assignations.

We will now present our overall conclusions in plain English. First, it can be stated with a high degree of certainty that the umbrella-term *yeren* (Wildman) has encompassed a wide variety of known animals, such as bears, gibbon apes, and macaque and golden monkeys (even one of the authors, Poirier, was once mistaken for a Wildman—which almost resulted in his demise—when villagers who had not previously seen a hairy Westerner encountered his almost-nude body napping by a river!). An extreme conservative opinion would probably "solve" the Wildman question by attributing *all* reports to such known animals, as well as hoaxes. We do not concur with such an assessment.

Our investigations indicate that, while a number of known animals (and probable hoaxes) have been involved, the umbrella-term *yeren* also includes animal forms which cannot be so easily explained away. In fact, such hard-

to-dismiss reports fall into two discrete categories, indicating the possibility of two distinct animal species being involved: a giant, hair-covered and bipedal primate, and a smaller (but still large) hair-covered and quadrupedal primate. While the imagery of the former morph is now well-known to cryptozoological investigators, some of whom have proposed that, like the American Sasquatch, the fossil genus *Gigantopithecus* could be involved, the latter morph, particularly its quadrupedal mode of locomotion, has not been previously reported. This is probably because the information has not passed accurately though the sociocultural and linguistic filters which exist on the route between the eyewitnesses' personal descriptions and their interpretation in subsequent publications, particularly when translated into European languages in Western publications.

The descriptions of a large and unknown quadrupedal morph in modern China add a new and interesting dimension to the Wildman problem. We propose that the descriptions of this second morph may result from observations of orang-utans (*Pongo*), either the known species or, more likely, a related species—perhaps even a fossil form—populations of which might still survive in rugged and isolated pockets of the country. When observed, such large, red-haired primates could well be referred to by the generic term *yeren* by the local inhabitants. We should remember that, before this mythical ape was "discovered" by science, the original meaning of the Malay term *orang-utan* was (and is) "wild man of the forest."

Serious questions could surely be raised concerning habitat and ecology, as well as the nutritional requirements of such Chinese orang-utans. Concerning habitat, after visiting the mountains of Sichuan—and we were not able to penetrate the truly remote areas—we are convinced that large, unknown species could persist there indefinitely almost undetected. The ecological and nutritional problems presented are also not insurmountable. However, we do not propose to dwell on the subject at length here, as a longer paper specifically addressing this question is planned for the future.

As for the proposed relationship between the bipedal Wildman reports and the fossil genus *Gigantopithecus,* such a giant primate did exist in China until relatively recent times, between 300,000 and 500,000 years ago (although there is still uncertainty as to whether it was a biped). In fact, *Gigantopithecus* is the longest-living primate genus known (at least in the last 30 million years), having survived a period of about 8 million years. It takes only a little "push" to propose its survival another half-million years to the present time, particularly as some of its associated *Ailuropoda-Stegodon* fauna, such as the giant panda (discovered by science as recently as 1869 and not brought back alive by Westerners until the late 1930's), persist to the present time.

However, we should also emphasize that, although *Gigantopithecus* may be an attractive candidate for the bipedal Wildman, this does not by any means make its present survival an established fact. Further physical evidence of the reported animal, and preferably also of the fossil species, would need to be found and compared before such a determination could be reached. There is also the possibility—albeit less likely—of another large primate, unknown paleontologically and zoologically, being responsible for such Wildman reports.

In conclusion, it is our opinion that numerous *known* primates (including *Homo sapiens*) have been labeled "Wildman" (*yeren*); that there is a high probability that one and possibly two different genera of unknown or cryptic primates may also be involved (one of them being *Pongo,* an orang-utan); that the matter remains unresolved; and that further investigation is certainly warranted. Due to the difficulties of terrain and logistics, as well as sociocultural, political, and linguistic factors, such future investigations will not be easy to conduct.

We would like to thank numerous individuals in China who made the expedition possible, and who collaborated with help and information: Cao Han min, Ji Weizhi, Li Guo Hua, Liu Mingzhuang, Shan Yu-Sheng, Tang Jia-Yong, Wu Xinzhi, Yi Guangyuan, Zeng Xianzhou, Zheng (Edward) Xu, Zhou Guoxing, and all the members of the Wuxi Science Committee. We also wish to express our appreciation to producer Geraldine Easter and Bernadette Drury of The Filmworks, and director Ian Duncan, cameraman Michael Coles, and soundman George Hitchins, all of London, England, for their extensive administrative, logistical, and artistic efforts, as well as for their inspiration and participation in the project.

Future Plans

The authors currently have no plans to conduct further Wildman investigations in China. Author Poirier will be returning to China in the future in connection with other primatological work, and attempts to acquire new information will be made as a matter of course. We plan a future paper outlining in more detail the possibility of living orang-utans in China.